

NEWS RELEASE

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
318 South Sixth Street
Springfield, IL 62701
Tel: 217/492-4450

RODGER A. HEATON
U.S. ATTORNEY
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS



For Immediate Release
November 30, 2006

Contact: Sharon Paul
(217) 492-4450

Central Illinois Partnerships, Awareness Changing 'Face of Meth'

DOJ Observes National Methamphetamine Awareness Day

Springfield, IL – The Department of Justice has designated November 30, 2006, as National Methamphetamine Awareness Day to raise public awareness and promote discussion of effective methods to combat ongoing demand for this addictive and dangerous drug. In the Central District of Illinois, United States Attorney Rodger A. Heaton recognized the significant strides already undertaken in central Illinois in this fight.

U.S. Attorney Heaton stated, "Throughout central Illinois, federal, state and local law enforcement officials are not only working together, but also partnering with officials from the fields of agriculture, environmental protection, substance abuse treatment, and with other policymakers to reduce meth production and use in our communities. New state laws limiting the availability of precursor drugs and increasing state criminal penalties for meth production are providing law enforcement with additional, effective tools in the fight against meth. These comprehensive efforts are making a difference."

The Illinois State Police reports a notable decrease in the number of clandestine meth labs seized to date in 2006 compared to 2005. Through October 2006, the Illinois State Police reports that 653 clandestine labs have been seized compared to the 1,189 labs seized in 2005 by its Meth Response Teams, Metropolitan Enforcement Groups and task forces operating throughout the state. In mid-2005, the Illinois State Police assigned officers to six Methamphetamine Response Teams deployed in all parts of the state to detect and address meth production and use.

As local production of methamphetamine became an increasing problem for law enforcement in Illinois in the late 1990s, there was a comprehensive effort to build upon the experience of western states who were already confronting the meth problem as it migrated from the west coast. This coordinated effort recognized the importance of working with agencies and organizations outside traditional law enforcement to deal with the environmental and health issues associated with meth labs. In the Central District of Illinois, the U.S. Attorney's Office established a Methamphetamine Advisory Committee which not only tapped the resources and expertise of law enforcement, but also the agricultural, environmental, mental health, and training agencies of all levels of government. The Illinois State Police, the Illinois Attorney General's Office, and the Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board each made significant efforts in aggressively responding to the problems and effecting change.

(More)

The advisory committee participated in a number of comprehensive efforts including the following:

- ▶ ensured law enforcement at all levels used a common reporting system to properly and accurately identify the scope of the problem;
- ▶ developed training for officers responding and working with clandestine labs; procured state-of-the-art safety equipment for responding officers;
- ▶ supported legislation to limit availability of precursors used to produce methamphetamine;
- ▶ supported legislation to increase state criminal penalties for meth production;
- ▶ increased education and awareness within the agricultural community to prevent or restrict the availability and use of anhydrous ammonia as well as training for law enforcement on the dangers of working with anhydrous ammonia; and,
- ▶ increased awareness within the business community of the distribution of precursor items and use of motel rooms to produce meth.

While recognizing the importance of using a comprehensive approach to address the growing methamphetamine problem in central Illinois, the U.S. Attorney's Office worked with the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Illinois State Police, the Illinois Attorney General's Office, local state's attorneys, sheriffs and police departments to make the prosecution of meth producers and distributors a high priority. Successful task force investigations and prosecutions begun in 2001 and 2002 have led to the federal prosecution and conviction of more than 75 meth producers and distributors in Fulton, Tazewell, Adams, Macoupin and Christian counties.

Although these efforts have made an impact, U.S. Attorney Heaton cautioned against growing complacent. Heaton stated, "Education and awareness are making a difference in our efforts to effectively address the meth problem in central Illinois; however, the demand for this highly addictive drug remains. The prosecution of meth producers and distributors remains a top priority of the Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney's office. We are committed to remaining vigilant in our enforcement efforts to ensure that those who seek to profit from the demand are prosecuted."

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